

## Saint Mary's Alumni Abound

By Andrea A. Firth



SMC Alumni on campus for the Reunion festivities

Photo Andrea A. Firth

Saint Mary's College (SMC) graduates don't venture too far from their alma mater—about 25% of the College's alumni population can be found within the boundaries of Contra Costa County. While some former students were raised in the area, many alumni from other parts of California and outside the state made a connection with the East Bay while in college and chose to stay put or return soon after graduation.

"The largest concentration of Saint Mary's alumni can be found in Contra Costa County. There are about 10,000," states Chris Carter, Associate Director of Alumni Relations for the College and a graduate of the class of '97, who chose to both work for and live by his old school.

"Because of the nature of SMC, [alumni] feel a real

fondness and connection with the College," says Carter. "There is a strong feeling of school pride right now which is probably tied to SMC's recent athletic successes," he adds. "Alumni engagement has increased dramatically over the past few years."

Last weekend, SMC held its annual reunion weekend hosting approximately 600 former students from the classes of 1958 through 2003. Alumni from near and far are invited back every five years to participate in class-specific events, such as a golf outing or party, and an all-college day of festivities including a family barbeque, mass, and dinner dance. Alumni are invited to stay on campus for a second chance at college dormitory living, and about a third of the attendees opt to sleep and shower in the townhouse residence

halls.

Moraga residents Claudia and Tim McCaffrey were among several Lamorinda locals who reconnected with college friends over the reunion weekend. The McCaffreys met while attending Saint Mary's and have lived in Moraga for much of their married lives. Claudia, who grew up in Walnut Creek, admits that she did not pay much attention to life in Moraga outside of the campus while attending SMC. "I didn't think of Moraga as a college town, but I also wasn't thinking about it as a place where I might raise a family. It kind of just happened."

Proximity to campus and reunion weekends are not the only things that keep the McCaffreys coming back to SMC. Claudia has a nephew and cousin now attending the College, and like many in

town, they are season ticket-holders for the men's basketball games.

Brother Raphael Patton, a member of SMC's 100th graduating class (1963) and an SMC faculty member for the past 38 years, reconnected with about twenty of his college friends on the golf course during the reunion weekend.

Patton, who seems content with having spent much of his life and career at Saint Mary's, admits that landing back on the Moraga campus was not necessarily his idea. "You kind of go where you are sent," he confides.

Like many SMC alumni, Patton was raised nearby. "I was born and raised in Concord before anyone or anything was there," he says. As one of forty brothers-in-training while he attended Saint Mary's as an undergraduate, Patton was discouraged from mingling with the rest of the student body. "We weren't supposed to mix too much with the other students, but we found ways," he hints.

"I never feel quite at home unless I'm here," adds Patton. "I don't know what it is—the fog, the hills, the proximity to the ocean. I don't want to live anywhere else but here."